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ARGENTINE COMMISSION for HUMAN RIGHTS

COMISION ARGENTINA POR LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS (CADHU)
Washington, D.C. Information Bureau

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August 31st, 1977

President James Carter
White House
Washington D.C.

Dear President Carter:

On September 7th you will sign the new canal treaty between the United States and the Republic of Panama. This treaty will be an important step forward towards the recognition of Panamanian sovereignty over the canal. For that occasion you will host the visit of the heads of state of most member nations of the Organization of American States. Among them will be those representing the worst human rights violators of our hemisphere, including General Videla with whom reportedly you will be having a personal meeting. We think this is an appropriate opportunity to share with you our views on the evolving policies of your administration with respect to Argentina.

Upon return from his visit to Argentina, Mr. Terence Todman, Assistant Secretary of State for Interamerican Affairs, was widely quoted by the world press saying that "violations of human rights have decreased" in that country, and that everyone he had spoken with believed that "there had been improvements in all areas." In addition, in a clear reference to the critical attitudes towards the repressive Argentine military regime prevailing in the U.S. Congress, Mr. Todman affirmed that some in the U.S. had a "distorted view of Argentine reality" and that the press was to be partially blamed for this situation.

Amnesty International, and the International Commission of Jurists as well as the United States' Department of State and the United States Embassy in Buenos Aires are well aware of the long list of human rights violations which have taken place in Argentina in the period immediately preceding Mr. Todman's visit to that country. Furthermore, contrary to Mr. Todman's statements to the press, opposition to the military regime of General Videla has been steadily growing in recent months. On June 4th, for example, leading members of the Radical Civic Union Party, some of whom met with Mr. Todman, made public a statement criticising explicitly all aspects of the military regime's policies. Five other political parties representing together over 80% of the electorate are currently discussing ways of promoting a prompt return to constitutional rule. In addition, some of the trade unionists who met with Mr. Todman had chosen only weeks before, not to be identified with the military regime by refusing to participate in the Argentine official delegation to the International Labor Organization's convention in Geneva, thus denouncing the total disregard for internationally recognized trade union rights in Argentina.

In short, Mr. Todman's public comments on Argentina are misleading

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because there is in fact no indication of any significant improvement in the human rights situation in Argentina, and because representative democratic political figures are now expressing openly, within the limits imposed by the repression, their disapproval of the military regime's political, economic, trade union and human rights policies. Mr. Todman's criticisms of the press are particularly unfair considering that journalists in Argentina have been severely victimized by the regime, and that members of the foreign press corp have often risked their jobs and their lives attempting to report accurately on the brutalities committed by the Argentine Armed Forces. These misrepresentations can only favor the resurgence of a U.S. policy conciliatory with the repressive military regimes of Latin America — a policy throughly discredited among the peoples of the world and the people of the United States.

The Washington Post of August 30 reports that in recent weeks the Argentine government has begun an ambitious public relations offensive in an attempt to change their international image which includes "a reputation for institutionalized repression, political imprisonment and torture that has brought them both verbal and economic sanctions." In this context your upcoming meeting with General Videla acquires special significance. Interested parties in the U.S. and particularly in those countries ruled by discredited and diplomatically isolated regimes, will attempt to portray your hosting and meeting with the Latin American dictators as an expression of tacit support for their past and current policies, as well a departure from your stated intentions on human rights. A week before your scheduled meetings with General Videla, the government controlled press in Argentina is already depicting this event as a significant diplomatic achievement of the military regime. We fear, Mr. President, that unless you explicitly and publicly disassociate yourself from the dictatorial and brutal practices of some of your guests you may, in the eyes of the world, be lastingly identified with them.

Therefore, in view of the above and deeply concerned about the damage being done to the cause of human rights and democratic liberties in Argentina in particular, and in the Americas in general, we recommend that you consider the following suggestions.

During your meeting with General Videla put forth specific basic requests whose fulfillment should become your administration's known and publicized basic criteria for evaluating whether or not there is any progress in the Argentine situation. These requests should be:

- to make public a complete list of all political prisoners held, including those "disappeared persons" presumed to be held in concentration camps around the country, the charges against them, and their places of detention.

- to restore and respect the constitutional right of prisoners held under State of Siege regulations to leave Argentina for the country of their choice

- to grant former President Dr. Hector Campora, who sought asylum in the Mexican Embassy in Buenos Aires 16 months ago, the safe-conduct to leave Argentina as he has requested.

- to thoroughly investigate the abduction and possible murder of Dr. Hidalgo Sola, Argentine Ambassador to Venezuela, to prosecute and punish those responsible for this action.

We also recommend that you address the issue exemplified by Mr. Todman's recent statements by instructing the Bureau of Interamerican Affairs of the Department of State, as well as all other branches of your administration, to depict accurately the political and human rights situation in Argentina, and to make known to the American people the information available to the U.S. government on human rights violations in Argentina.

Hoping that these recommendations contribute to the restoration of democracy in our hemisphere, and to the freedom and wellbeing of our peoples, I remain,

Horacio D. Lofredo